Read this 27 January 169 5/6
in presence of my Dear wife

SERMON

Preached before the

KING,

Febr. 25th 167 5/6.

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1 JOHN 3. 10.

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.

IT is certainly a matter of the greatest consequence to us, both in order to our present peace and future happiness, truly to understand our spiritual state and condition, and whether we belong to God and be his Children or not. And it is not so difficult as is commonly

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imagined to arrive at this knowledg, if we have a mind to it, and will but deal impartially with our ſelves; For the Text gives us a plain mark and character whereby we may know it, *In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.*

From which words I ſhall endeavour, by God's aſſiſtance, to lay men open to themſelves, and to repreſent to every one of us the truth of our condition; and then leave it to the grace of God, and every mans ſerious conſideration, to make the beſt uſe of it.

I ſhall briefly explain the words, and then conſider the matter contained in them.

By the children of God, and the children of the Devil, are meant good and bad men; It being uſual in the phraſe of Scripture, to call perſons or things which partake of ſuch a nature or quality, the Children of thoſe who are eminently endued with that nature and diſpoſition. Thus they who are of the faith of *Abra-*

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ham, and do the works of *Abraham*, are called *Abraham's children*: In like manner, those who in their disposition and actions imitate God, are called *the Children of God*; and on the contrary, those that addict themselves to sin and impiety are counted of another race and descent, they resemble the Devil, and belong to him as the Chief and Head of that Faction.

By *righteousness*, is here meant universal goodness and conformity to the Law of God, in opposition to sin which is the transgression of that Law.

By being *manifest*, is meant, that hereby good and bad men are really distinguished; so that every one that will examine his condition by this mark, may know of which number he is, and to what Party he belongs.

I come now to the main argument contained in the words, which is to give us a certain character, and mark of distinction between a good and bad man; ἐν τούτῳ, *by this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not*

not righteousness, is not of God.

In the management of the following Discourse, I shall proceed in this method.

First, We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here laid down; *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God.*

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, come to the knowledg of his spiritual estate and condition. *By this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.*

Thirdly, I shall enquire whence it comes to pass, that notwithstanding this, so many persons are at so great uncertainty concerning their condition.

I. We will consider the character and mark of difference between a good and bad man, which is here in the Text, *Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God*; which implies likewise on the contrary, that *whosoever doth righteousness, is of God.* Now in the strictest sense of

this phraſe, he only who lives in all the commandements of God blameleſs, can be ſaid to *do righteouſneſs*: But in this ſenſe *there is none that doth righteouſneſs, no not one*, and conſequently none could be the Children of God; but the Text ſuppoſes ſome to be ſo, and therefore by *doing righteouſneſs* the *Apoſtle* muſt neceſſarily be underſtood to mean ſomething that is ſhort of perfect and unſinning obedience. So that the queſtion is, What *doing of righteouſneſs* is ſufficient to denominate a man a *Child of God*, and to put him into a ſtate of grace and favour with Him.

And I do not intend nicely to ſtate this matter. 'Tis not perhaps poſſible to be done; nothing being more difficult, than to determine the very utmoſt bounds and limits of things, and to tell exactly and juſt to a point where the line of difference between Virtue and Vice, between the ſtate of a good and bad man is to be placed: And if it could be done, it would be of no great uſe; for I take it to be no part of my buſineſs to tell

men how many faults they may have, and how little goodneſs, and yet be *the Children of God:* but rather to acquaint them, what degrees of holineſs and goodneſs are neceſſary to give men a clear and comfortable evidence of their good eſtate towards God; and then to perſwade them, in order to their peace and aſſurance, to endeavour after ſuch degrees.

Wherefore to ſtate the buſineſs ſo far as is neceſſary to give men a ſufficient knowledg of their condition, I ſhall briefly conſider who they are that in the Apoſtles ſenſe may be ſaid to be *doers of righteouſneſs*, or *not doers of it.* And becauſe the *Apoſtle* lays down the Rule negatively, I ſhall therefore

In the *firſt* place, enquire who they are that in the *Apoſtles* ſenſe may be ſaid *not to do righteouſneſs.*

1. They that live in the general courſe of a wicked life; in the practice of great and known ſins, as injuſtice, intemperance, filthy and ſenſual luſts, profane neglect and contempt of God and Religion;

gion; ſo that by the whole courſe and tenour of their actions, it is plain beyond all denial that *there is no fear of God before their eyes.* Concerning theſe the caſe is ſo very evident, that it ſeems too mild and gentle an expreſſion to call them *not doers of righteouſneſs.*

2. They who live in the habitual practice of any one known ſin, or in the neglect of any conſiderable part of their known duty. For any vicious habit denominates a man, and puts him into an evil ſtate.

3. They who are guilty of the ſingle act of a very heinous and notorious crime; as a deliberate act of blaſphemy, of murther, perjury, fraud or oppreſſion, or of any other crime of the like enormity. For though ordinarily one ſingle act of ſin doth not denominate one a bad man, when the general courſe of the mans life is contrary; yet the ſingle acts of ſome ſorts of ſins are ſo crying and heinous, and do ſo ſtare every mans conſcience in the face, that they are juſtly eſteemed to be of equal malignity with vicious habits

of an inferiour kind; becauſe they do almoſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe a great depravation of mind, and a monſtrous alienation from God and goodneſs in the perſon that deliberately commits them. And they who are guilty in any of theſe three degrees now mentioned are moſt certainly *not doers of righteouſneſs*, and conſequently it is *manifeſt* that they are not *the Children of God.*

In the *ſecond* place, I ſhall enquire who they are, that in the *Apoſtles* ſenſe may be ſaid to *do righteouſneſs.* In ſhort, they who in the general courſe of their lives do keep the Commandments of God. And this implies theſe two things; That *the tenour of our lives and actions be agreeable to the Laws of God*; And that *theſe actions be done with a ſincere and upright mind*, out of regard to God and another World, and not for low and temporal ends.

And I chuſe rather to deſcribe a righteous man by the actual conformity of the general courſe of his actions to the Law of God, than (as ſome have done) by

by a ſincere Deſire or reſolution of obedience. For a deſire may be ſincere for the time it laſts, and yet vaniſh before it come to any real effect. And how innocently ſoever it was intended, it is certainly a great miſtake in Divinity and of very dangerous conſequence to the ſouls of men, to affirm that a Deſire of grace is grace; and conſequently, by the ſame reaſon, that a deſire of obedience, is obedience. A ſincere deſire and reſolution to be good is indeed a good beginning, and ought by all means to be cheriſhed and encouraged; but yet it is far enough from being the thing deſired, or from being accepted for it in the eſteem of God: For God never accepts the Deſire for the deed, but where there is no poſſibility, no opportunity of doing the thing deſired; but if there be, and the thing be not done, there is no reaſon to imagine that the deſire in that caſe ſhould be accepted as if the thing were done. For inſtance, If a man give alms according to his ability, and would give more if he were able, in this caſe the

deſire is accepted for the deed. And of this caſe it is and no other, that the *Apoſtle* ſpeaks, 2 *Cor.* 8. 12. *If there be firſt a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* That is, God interprets and accepts the charity of men according to the largeneſs of their hearts, and not according to the ſtraitneſs of their fortunes: But it is a great miſtake, to draw a general concluſion from this Text, that in all caſes God accepts the will for the deed. For though a man ſincerely deſire and reſolve to reform his life (as I doubt not many men often do) but do it not, when there is time and opportunity for it, theſe deſires and reſolutions are of no account with God; all this *righteouſneſs is but as the morning cloud, and as the early dew which paſſeth away.* Men are not apt to miſtake ſo groſly in other matters. No man believes hunger to be meat, or thirſt to be drink; and yet there is no doubt of the truth and ſincerity of theſe natural deſires. No man thinks that covetouſneſs or a greedy deſire to be rich,

is an eſtate; or that ambition or an inſatiable deſire of honour is really advancement: Juſt ſo, and no otherwiſe, a deſire to be good is righteouſneſs. The *Apoſtle's* caution a little before the Text may fitly be applied to this purpoſe, *Little children, let no man deceive you: He that doth righteouſneſs is righteous, even as he is righteous.* Not but that the beſt of men do ſometimes fall through infirmity, and are betrayed by ſurpriſe, and born down by the violence of temptation; but if the general courſe of our actions be a *doing of righteouſneſs*, the grace of the Goſpel, in and through the merits of our bleſſed Saviour, doth accept of this imperfect but ſincere obedience.

II. I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that by this mark every man may, with due care and diligence, arrive at the certain knowledg of his ſpiritual eſtate and condition. *By this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.* By which the *Apoſtle* means, that this is a real

real mark of difference betwixt good and bad men, and that whereby they very often manifeſt themſelves to others; eſpecially when the courſe of their lives is eminently pious and virtuous, or notoriouſly impious and wicked. But becauſe it doth not ſo much concern us curiouſly to enquire into, much leſs ſeverely to cenſure the ſtate of other men, I ſhall only conſider at preſent, how far by this mark and character every man may make a certain judgment of his own good or bad condition.

1. By this character, as I have explained it, he that is a bad man may certainly know himſelf to be ſo, if he will but conſider his condition, and do not wilfully deceive and delude himſelf. As for thoſe who are vicious in the general courſe of their lives, or have been guilty of the act of ſome heinous and notorious ſin, not yet repented of; their caſe is ſo plain, even to themſelves, that they can have no manner of doubt concerning it. Such men ſtand continually convicted, and condemned by the ſentence of their own minds:

minds: and whenever they reflect upon themselves (which they do as seldom as they can) they are *a terrour to themselves*, and full of amazement and fearful expectation of judgment.

And for those who are sinners of a lesser rate, and perhaps allow themselves only in one kind of vice, they likewise have reason to conclude themselves in a bad condition; especially if they consider that he who lives in the breach of any one commandment of God is guilty of all, because he contemns that authority which enacted the whole Law. And 'tis easie for any man to discern the habit of any sin in himself; as when he frequently commits it, when he takes up no firm resolutions against it, when he useth no competent care to avoid the temptations to it, nor puts forth any vigorous endeavours to break off from it; or however, still continues in the practice of it. For the customary practice of any known sin, is utterly inconsistent with sincere resolutions and endeavours against it; there being no greater evidence of the insincerity

of resolutions and endeavours in any kind, than still to go on to do contrary to them.

2. By this character likewise, they that are sincerely good may generally be well assured of their good condition, and that they are *the children of God*. And there are but two things necessary to evidence this to them; That the general course and tenour of their actions be agreeable to the Laws of God; and That they be sincere and upright in those actions. And both these every man may sufficiently know concerning himself; for if the Laws of God be plain, and lye open to every mans understanding, then is it as easie for every man to know when he obeys God and keeps his commandments, as when he obeys the commands of his Father or his Prince, and when he keeps the known Laws of the Land. And no sensible and considerate man ever had any doubt of this kind; for if a man can know any thing, he can certainly tell when he keeps or breaks a known Law; so that all scruples of this nature are frivolous and idle

pretences to cover mens faults, and ſuch as they would be aſhamed to alledge in any other caſe.

And a good man may likewiſe know when he obeys God ſincerely. Not but that men often deceive themſelves with an opinion, or at leaſt a groundleſs hope of their own ſincerity; but if they will deal fairly with themſelves, and uſe due care and diligence, there are very few caſes (if any) wherein they may not know their own ſincerity in any act of obedience to God: For what can a man know concerning himſelf, if not the reality of his own intentions? If any man ſhould in earneſt tell me, that he doubted very much whether he had that friendſhip for me which he made profeſſion of, and that he was afraid that his affection to me was not real and ſincere, I confeſs I ſhould doubt of it too; becauſe I ſhould certainly conclude that no man could know that matter ſo well as he himſelf. And there is no doubt but whoever hath a hearty kindneſs for another, and a ſincere deſire to ſerve and pleaſe him, knows he has it.

And accordingly good and holy men in Scripture do every where with great confidence and assurance appeal to God, concerning the integrity and sincerity of their hearts towards him: And I cannot call to mind so much as any one passage in Scripture, from whence it can be collected that any good man ever doubted of his own sincerity: And to say the truth, it is not modesty but impudence for any man to suspect himself of hypocrisy, good men have always abhorred the thoughts of it. Ye have heard of the patience of *Job*, and yet he could not bear to have his integrity questioned. It was a brave and a generous speech of his, *Till I dye, I will not remove my integrity from me.*

And yet it hath so happened, that *this* is become a very common doubt among religious people; and they have been so unreasonably cherished in it, as to have it made a considerable evidence of a mans sincerity to doubt of it himself. It is indeed said in Scripture, *Jer.* 17.9. *That the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?* which

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is true concerning our future intentions and actions; no man knowing how his mind may change hereafter. Little did *Hazael* think that ever he should do those things which the Prophet foretold him. But though this be true in it self, yet 'tis not the meaning of that Text. For the Prophet in that *chapter* plainly makes use of this consideration of the falshood and deceitfulness of mans heart, as an argument to take of the people of *Israel* from *trusting in the arm of flesh* and in those promises which were made to them of forreign assistance from *Egypt*: Because men may pretend fair, and yet deceive those that rely upon them; for *the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked*, and none but God knows whether mens inward intentions be answerable to their outward professions; for *he searcheth the heart and tryeth the reins*. But now because God alone knows the hearts of all men, and the sincerity of their intentions towards one another, doth it from hence follow that it is a thing either impossible or very difficult for any man to know the sin-

ſincerity of his own preſent intentions and actions? To make any ſuch concluſion were to *condemn the generation of Gods children*, thoſe holy and excellent men in Scripture, *Job*, and *David*, and *Hezekiah*, and St. *Paul*, who do ſo frequently appeal to God concerning their own integrity. And ſurely when the *Apoſtle* ſaith, *No man knows the things of a man, but the ſpirit of a man which is in him*, he plainly ſuppoſes that every man is conſcious to the motions and intentions of his own mind. I have inſiſted the longer upon this, that I might from the very foundation deſtroy an imagination, which is not only untrue in it ſelf, but has likewiſe been a very great hinderance to the peace and comfort of many good men.

III. Let us enquire whence it comes to paſs, that notwithſtanding this, ſo many perſons are at ſo great uncertainty about their ſpiritual condition. For the clearing of this matter, we will deſtinctly conſider theſe three things. *Firſt*, The grounds of the falſe hopes and confidence of men really bad concerning their good condition

tion. *Secondly*, The cauſleſs doubts and jealouſies of men really good concerning their bad condition. And *thirdly*, The juſt cauſes of doubting in others. As for the troubles and fears of men who are notoriouſly bad and live in the practice of known vices, theſe do not fall under our conſideration: If they be troubled about their condition, it is no more than what they ought to be; and if they be only doubtful of it, it is leſs than they ought to be. To perſons in this condition there is only counſel to be given, to leave their ſins and become better; but no comfort to be adminiſtred to them, till firſt they have followed that counſel: For till they reform, if they think themſelves to be in a bad condition, they think juſt as they ought, and as there is great reaſon; and no body ſhould go about to perſwade them otherwiſe.

Firſt then, we will conſider the grounds of the falſe hopes and confidence of men really bad concerning their good condition. I do not now mean the worſt of men, but ſuch as make ſome ſhew and appear-

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ance of goodneſs. It is very unpleaſing to men to fall under the hard opinion and cenſure of others, but the moſt grievous thing in the world for a man to be condemned by himſelf; and therefore it is no wonder that men uſe all manner of ſhifts to avoid ſo great an inconvenience as is the ill opinion of a mans ſelf concerning himſelf and his own condition.

Some therefore rely upon the profeſſion of the Chriſtian Faith and their being baptized into it. But this is ſo far from being any exemption from a good life, that it is the greateſt and moſt ſolemn obligation to it. Doſt thou believe the Doctrine of the Goſpel? thou of all men art inexcuſable if thou alloweſt thy ſelf in ungodlineſs and worldly luſts. Others truſt to their external Devotion, they frequent the Church and ſerve God conſtantly, they pray to him, and hear his word, and receive the bleſſed Sacrament: But let us not deceive our ſelves, God is not mocked. All this is ſo far from making amends for the impiety of our lives, that on the contrary, the impiety of our lives ſpoils all

all the acceptance of our devotions. *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law* (*that is*, from obeying it) *even his prayer ſhall be an abomination.* Others depend very much upon their repentance, eſpecially if they ſet ſolemn times apart for it. And there is no doubt but that a ſincere repentance will put a man into a good condition: But then it is to be conſidered, that no repentance is ſincere but that which produceth a real change and reformation in our lives. Others ſatisfie themſelves with the exerciſe of ſome particular graces and virtues, as Juſtice, and Liberality, and Charity. And is it not a thouſand pities that thy life is not all of a piece, and that all the other parts of it are not anſwerable to theſe; that thou ſhouldeſt loſe the reward of ſo much real goodneſs out of thy fondneſs to any one vice or luſt? Haſt thou never heard what the Scripture ſaith, that *he who offends in one point is a tranſgreſſour of the whole Law?* To make a man a good man all parts of goodneſs muſt concurr, but any one way of wickedneſs is ſufficient to denominate

a man bad. *Laſtly*, Some comfort themſelves in the good opinion which perhaps others have of them. But if we know our ſelves to be bad, it is not the good opinion of others concerning us which can either alter or better our condition. They may have reaſon for their charity, and yet thou none for thy confidence. Truſt no body concerning thy ſelf rather than thy ſelf, becauſe no body can know thee ſo well as thou maiſt know thy ſelf. Theſe, and ſuch as theſe, are the hopes of the hypocrite, which *Job* elegantly compares to *the ſpiders web*, finely and artificially wrought, but miſerably thin and weak; ſo that we our ſelves may ſee through them, and if we lay the leaſt ſtreſs upon them they will vaniſh.

Secondly, We will conſider in the next place the cauſeleſs doubts and jealouſies of men really good concerning their bad condition.

1. Some are afraid that they are reprobated from all eternity, and therefore they cannot be the *children of God*. This is ſo unreaſonable, that if it were not a real cauſe

cauſe of trouble to ſome perſons, it did not deſerve to be conſidered. For no man that ſincerely endeavours to pleaſe God and to keep his commandments hath from Scripture the leaſt ground to ſuſpect any latent or ſecret decree of God againſt him that ſhall work his ruine. But whatever the decrees of God be concerning the eternal ſtate of men, they can certainly be no rule either of our duty or comfort. And therefore for men to judg of their condition by the decrees of God which are hid from us, and not by his word which is *near us and in our hearts*, is as if a man wandring in the wide ſea, in a dark night when the heaven is all clouded about him, ſhould yet reſolve to ſteer his courſe by the ſtars, which he cannot ſee; and neglect the compaſs, which is at hand and would afford him a much better and more certain direction.

2. Good men are conſcious to themſelves of many frailties and imperfections, and therefore they are afraid of their condition. But God conſiders the infirmities of our preſent ſtate, and expects no other

obedience from us, in order to our acceptance with him, but what this ſtate of imperfection is capable of: And provided the ſincere endeavour and general courſe of our lives be to pleaſe him and keep his Commandments, the terms of the Goſpel are ſo merciful, that our frailties ſhall not be imputed to us, ſo as to affect our main ſtate, and to make us ceaſe to be the children of God.

3. They are afraid their obedience is not ſincere becauſe it proceeds many times from fear, and not always out of pure love to God. For anſwer to this: It is plain from Scripture, that God propounds to men ſeveral motives and arguments to obedience; ſome proper to work upon their *fear*, as the threatnings of puniſhment; ſome upon their *hope*, as the promiſes of bleſſing and reward; others upon their *love*, as the mercies and forgiveneſs of God. From whence it is evident he intended they ſhould all work upon us. And accordingly the Scripture gives us inſtances in each kind. *Noah moved with fear* obeyed God in *preparing an Ark*:

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Moſes had reſpect unto the recompence of reward: Mary Magdalen loved much. And as it is hard to ſay, ſo it is not neceſſary to determine juſt how much influence and no more each of theſe hath upon us: It is very well if men be reclaimed from their ſins and made good, by the joint force of all the conſiderations which God offers to us. To be ſure Love is the nobleſt and moſt generous principle of obedience, but fear commonly takes the firſt and faſteſt hold of us, and in times of violent temptation is perhaps the beſt argument to keep even the beſt of men within the bounds of their duty.

4. Another cauſe of doubting in good men is, from a ſenſe of their imperfect performance of the duties of Religion, and of the abatement of their affections towards God at ſome times. They have many wandring thoughts in prayer and other exerciſes of devotion, and they cannot for their life keep their minds continually intent on what they are about. This we ſhould ſtrive againſt as much as we can, and that is the utmoſt we can do; but

but to cure this wholy is impoſſible, the infirmity of our nature and the frame of our minds will not admit of it: And therefore no man ought to queſtion his ſincerity, becauſe he cannot do that which is impoſſible for men to do.

And then for the abatement of our affections to God and Religion at ſome times, this naturally proceeds from the inconſtancy of mens tempers, by reaſon of which it is not poſſible that the beſt of men ſhould be able always to maintain and keep up the ſame degree of zeal and fervour towards God. But our comfort is, that God doth not meaſure mens ſincerity by the Tides of their affections, but by the conſtant bent of their reſolutions and the general tenour of their life and actions.

5. Another cauſe of theſe doubts is, that men expect more than ordinary and reaſonable aſſurance of their good condition; ſome particular revelation from God and extraordinary impreſſion upon their minds to that purpoſe, which they think the Scripture means by the *teſtimony* and

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ſeal and *earneſt of the Spirit.* God may give this when and to whom he pleaſes, but I do not find that he hath any where promiſed it. And all that the Scripture means by thoſe phraſes of the *teſtimony* and *ſeal* and *earneſt of the Spirit*, is to my apprehenſion no more but this, That the Holy Spirit which God beſtowed upon Chriſtians in ſo powerful and ſenſible a manner was a *ſeal* and *earneſt* of their reſurrection to eternal life, according to that plain Text, *Rom.* 8.11, *If the Spirit of him that raiſed up Jeſus from the dead dwell in you, he that raiſed up Chriſt from the dead ſhall alſo quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* But then who they are that have the Spirit of God is only to be known by the real fruits and effects of it. If we be *led by the Spirit*, and *walk in the Spirit*, and *do not fulfil the luſts of the fleſh*, then *the Spirit of Chriſt dwelleth in us.*

As for the caſe of *melancholy*, it is not a reaſonable caſe, and therefore doth not fall under any certain rules and directions. They who are under the power

of it, are ſeldom fit to take that counſel which alone is fit to be given them; and *that* is, not to believe themſelves concerning themſelves, but to truſt the judgment of others rather than their own apprehenſions. In other caſes every man knows himſelf beſt, but a melancholy man is moſt in the dark as to himſelf. This cauſe of trouble and doubting is very much to be pitied but hard to be removed, unleſs by phyſick, or by time, or by chance. One may happen to ſay ſomething that may hit the humour of a melancholy man, and ſatisfie him for the preſent; but Reaſon muſt needs ſignify very little to thoſe perſons, the nature of whoſe diſtemper it is to turn every thing that can be ſaid for their comfort into objections againſt themſelves.

Thirdly, But beſides thoſe who miſtake their condition, either by preſuming it to be better or fearing it to be worſe than it is, there are likewiſe others who upon good grounds are doubtful of their condition, and have reaſon to be afraid of it: Thoſe I mean, who have ſome beginnings of

of goodneſs, which yet are very imperfect: They have good reſolutions, and do many things well; but they often fall, and are frequently pull'd back by thoſe evil inclinations and habits which are yet in a great meaſure unſubdued in them. Theſe I cannot liken better than to the *Borderers* between two Countries, who live in the marches and confines of two powerful Kingdoms, both which have a great influence upon them, ſo that it is hard to ſay whoſe Subjects they are, and to which Prince they belong: Thus it is with many in Religion, They have pious inclinations, and have made ſome fair attempts towards goodneſs; they have begun to refrain from ſin, and to reſiſt the occaſions and temptations to it; but ever and anon they are maſtered by their old luſts, and carryed off from their beſt reſolutions; and perhaps upon a little conſideration they repent and recover themſelves again, and after a while are again entangled and overcome.

Now the caſe of theſe perſons is really doubtful, both to themſelves and others.

And the proper direction to be given them, in order to their peace and ſettlement, is by all means to encourage them to go on and to fortifie their good reſolutions; to be more vigilant and watchful over themſelves, to ſtrive againſt ſin and to reſiſt it with all their might. And according to the ſucceſs of their endeavours in this conflict, the evidence of their good condition will every day clear up and become more manifeſt: The more we grow in grace, the ſeldomer we fall into ſin, the more even and conſtant our obedience to God is, the greater and fuller ſatisfaction we ſhall have of our good eſtate towards God: For *the path of the juſt is as the ſhining light, which ſhines more and more unto the perfect day:* And *the work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace, and the effect of righteouſneſs quietneſs and aſſurance for ever.*

I ſhall only make two or three Inferences from what hath been diſcourſed upon this Argument, and ſo conclude.

1. From

1. From hence we learn the great danger of ſins of Omiſſion as well as Comiſſion; *Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs, is not of God.* The mere neglect of any of the great duties of Religion, of piety towards God, and of kindneſs and charity to men, though we be free from the commiſſion of great ſins, is enough to caſt us out of the favour of God and to ſhut us for ever out of his kingdom; *I was hungry and ye gave me no meat, thirſty and ye gave me no drink, ſick and in priſon and ye viſited me not, therefore depart ye curſed.*

2. It is evident from what hath been ſaid, That nothing can be vainer than for men to live in any courſe of ſin and impiety, and yet to pretend to be the Children of God, and to hope for eternal life. The Children of God will do the works of God, and whoever hopes to enjoy him hereafter will endeavour to be like him here; *Every man that hath this hope in Him, purifies himſelf, even as He is pure.*

3. You ſee what is the great mark and character of a mans good or bad condition; *whoſoever doth righteouſneſs is of God, and*

whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God. Here is a plain and ſenſible evidence by which every man that will deal honeſtly with himſelf may certainly know his own condition; and then according as he finds it to be, may take comfort in it, or make haſt out of it. And we need not aſcend into heaven nor go down into the deep, to ſearch out the ſecret counſels and decrees of God; there needs no anxious enquiry whether we be of the number of Gods elect: If we daily mortify our luſts, and grow in goodneſs, and take care to add to our faith and knowledg, temperance and patience and charity, and all other Chriſtian graces and virtues, we certainly take the beſt courſe in the World to *make our calling and election ſure.* And without this it is impoſſible that we ſhould have any comfortable and well grounded aſſurance of our good condition. This one mark of *doing righteouſneſs* is that into which all other ſigns and characters, which are in Scripture given of a good man, are finally reſolved: And this anſwers all thoſe various phraſes, which ſome men would

would make to be so many several and distinct marks of a *child of God*; As whether we have the true knowledg of God and Divine illumination, for *hereby we know that we know him if we keep his commandments*: Whether we sincerely love God, for *this is the love of God that we keep his commandments*: And whether God loves us, for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance will behold the upright*: Whether we be regenerate and born of God, for *whosoever is born of God sinneth not*: Whether we have *the Spirit of God witnessing with our Spirits that we are the children of God*, for *as many as have the Spirit of God are led by the Spirit*, and *by the Spirit do mortifie the deeds of the flesh*: Whether we belong to Christ, and have an interest in him or not, for *they that are Christs have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof*: In a word, Whether the promise of heaven and eternal life belong to us, for *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, but if we *have our fruit unto holiness, the end* will be *everlasting life*. So that you

see

ſee at laſt, the Scripture brings all to this one mark, *viz.* holineſs and obedience to the Laws of God, or a vicious and wicked life; *In this the children of God are manifeſt, and the children of the Devil: Whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God.*

Let us then deal impartially with our ſelves, and bring our lives and actions to this tryal; and never be at reſt till the matter be brought to ſome iſſue, and we have made a deliberate judgment of our condition, whether we be *the children of God* or not. And if upon a full and fair examination our conſciences give us this teſtimony, that by the grace of God we have *denyed ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, and have *lived ſoberly and righteouſly and godly in this preſent world*, we may take joy and comfort in it; for *if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God*: But if upon the ſearch and tryal of our ways our caſe appear clearly to be otherwiſe, or if we have juſt cauſe to doubt of it, let us not venture to continue one moment longer in ſo uncertain and dangerous a condition. And if w

deſiree

deſire to know the way of Peace, the Scripture hath ſet it plainly before us, *Waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well: Come now and let us reaſon together, ſaith the Lord; though your ſins be as ſcarlet they ſhall be white as ſnow: Let the wicked forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* Though our caſe be very bad, yet it is not deſperate; *This is a faithful ſaying, and worthy of all men to be embraced, that Jeſus Chriſt came into the world to ſave ſinners:* And he is ſtill willing to ſave us, if we be but willing to leave our ſins, and to ſerve him in holineſs and righteouſneſs the remaining part of our lives. We may yet be *turned from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God:* We who have ventured ſo long upon the brink of ruine, may yet by the infinite mercies of God, and by the power of his grace be reſcu'd from the baſe and miſerable ſlavery of the Devil

and our luſts *into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.*

And thus I have endeavoured, with all the plainneſs I could, to repreſent every man to himſelf, and to let him clearly ſee what his condition is towards God, and how the caſe of his ſoul and of his eternal happineſs ſtands. And I do verily believe that what I have ſaid in this matter is the truth of God, to which we ought all gladly to yield and render up our ſelves. For *great is Truth, and mighty above all things*: She is faithful and impartial in her counſels, and though ſhe be not always welcome, yet 'tis always wiſe to hearken to her, for in great kindneſs and charity ſhe lets men know their condition and the danger of it, that they may take care to prevent it: With her is no accepting of perſons, and in her judgment there is no unrighteouſneſs. I will conclude all with that excellent advice of a Heathen Philoſopher, *Make it no longer a matter of diſpute what are the marks and ſigns of a good man, but immediately ſet about it, and endeavour to become ſuch an one.*

Antonin. lib. 10.

FINIS.